SCIENCE

FRIDAY, APRIL 27, 1888.

THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, which held its annual meeting in Washington last week, is the most learned of all American scientific societies. Incorporated by the government of the United States, its expenses are paid out of the national treasury, although its members serve without compensation. Made by law the official scientific adviser of the government, it is required, at government expense, to enter upon any scientific investigation which may be asked for by the head of either of the departments, and its conclusions are accepted as those of a competent and disinterested tribunal. For instance: the consolidation of the various Western surveys that were being prosecuted at government expense into the present admirably organized National Geological Survey was the result of a report by a distinguished committee of the National Academy of Sciences, to whom the subject had been officially referred. Another important report was one on the work and discoveries of Dr. Peter Collier, formerly chemist of the Agricultural Department, in relation to sorghum; and more recently a special committee has been engaged, at the request of the secretary of the treasury, in an investigation in regard to the value of the polariscope test in determining grades of sugar. In addition to this official work, the National Academy of Sciences holds two meetings a year, at which business connected with its organization and work is transacted, new members chosen, and papers announcing new discoveries in science, or describing lines of original investigation, are read by members or by other persons presented by members. The meeting this year has been an important one. A larger number of papers than usual were presented; and, although no remarkable discoveries were announced, there was evidence of great activity, in many of them, along all the lines of original scientific investigation. The law limits the number of new members to be elected at each annual meeting to five. Only three were chosen this year, — Profs. G. Brown Goode, Albert Michelson, and S. C. Chandler; but the great scientific attainments of each are an ample guaranty of the purpose of the National Academy to maintain the high standard that has placed it at the head of all our scientific associations, and made membership in it so much coveted by scientific men.

NOTHING IN CONNECTION with the annual meeting of the National Academy of Sciences in Washington last week was likely to impress an attendant at its public sessions more than the ardent enthusiasm of its members in the work in which they are engaged. A few of them are young men, and more of those not members introduced to read papers had not yet reached middle age; but even they were no more absorbed in their labors, or more proud of their successes, than the wearers of snowy locks and gray beards. Even the venerable Dr. C. H. F. Peters, the distinguished astronomer, seemed as much elated at his success in proving that Tycho Brahe, in 1572, with a rude quadrant constructed by himself, determined the position of Nova with an accuracy that would be creditable to a modern astronomer with his wonderfully exact instruments, as was the youngest investigator at being able to add something to the sum of scientific knowledge.

IN THE LAMENTED death of Dr. Cornelius R. Agnew, whose funeral services took place on Saturday last, New York City lost one of its foremost citizens, and science and education a powerful advocate and friend. It was remarked on Saturday last, that so representative an assemblage of men had never before gathered at the bier of any one man in this city, and it was because of the many-sided character of Dr. Agnew's activity. Himself a physician and specialist of the very first rank, he chose the broader field of education for his most powerful efforts. As a trustee of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, as a trustee of Columbia College, and as a founder of the School of Mines, his influence in the cause of higher education can only be appreciated by those who felt it, and by those who worked with him. The friends of Columbia College looked instinctively to him to control and guide that university development which is now beginning its course. From all of these boards and from many others his wise and kindly counsel will be sorely missed, and his place cannot be easily filled, if ever. Dr. Agnew's personal contributions to medical science were principally made in the departments of ophthalmic and aural surgery. He was a prominent member of the Sanitary Commission during the Rebellion, and afterwards one of the founders of the Union League Club.

MEETING OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES.

A Successful Meeting; New Members and Councillors; Medals and Obituary Memoirs; Receptions and Dinners; List of Papers. — Is There Such a Thing as Potential Energy? — Serpent-Mound. — A New Method for the Biological Examination of the Air. — An Interesting Parasite on the Beaver. — The Orbits of Aerolites. — Improvements in Spectrum Photography; Carbon in the Sun. — Vertebrate Fauna of the Puerco Series.

THE meeting of the National Academy of Sciences, held at Washington last week, was in every respect a successful one. About forty members attended; the number of papers offered was greater than usual, nearly all of which were read *in extenso*, leaving very few to be read by title; and the attendance at the public meetings was good. While very little of the business transacted by the academy and by the council is disclosed to the public, it is known that the annual reports were satisfactory, although there was nothing in them of an unusual character. No great scientific discoveries were announced, but several of the papers read showed important progress in special lines of original investigation. Without disparity to others, three may be mentioned as of special importance. They were, 'The Orbits of Aerolites,' by Prof. H. A. Newton; 'Preliminary Notice of the Object, Methods, and Results of a Systematic Study of the Action of Definitely Related Chemical Compounds upon Animals,' by Profs. Wolcott Gibbs and Hobart Amory Hare; and 'Report of Progress in Spectrum Photography,' and 'Note on the Spectrum of Carbon and its Existence in the Sun,' by Prof. H. A. Rowland.

The new members of the academy this year are Prof. G. Brown Goode of Washington, assistant secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, in charge of the National Museum, and a distinguished naturalist; Prof. Albert Michelson, the physicist, of Cleveland, O. He is the gentleman who, when he was in the navy, undertook and carried out at Annapolis novel experiments to determine the velocity of light. He becomes the youngest member of the academy. The third new member is Prof. S. C. Chandler, the distinguished astronomer, of Cambridge, Mass. The six additional members of the council chosen at this meeting were Messrs. Brush, Langley, Meigs, Pickering, Remsen, and Gould.

On Wednesday evening the room at the National Museum in which the meetings of the academy were held was filled by an audience that was gathered to witness the presentation of two gold medals. One, the Lawrence Smith gold medal, was awarded to Prof. H. A. Newton of Yale University, for the study of meteors; and the other, the Henry Draper gold medal, to Prof. E. C. Picker-